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Poems

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Poems

Abstract

MUSEUMS AND MURALS, PASSING BY, A TITLE, EARLY SETTLER SONG

James Brown

MUSEUMS AND MURALS

I dreamed of a time
and it was the moko
on your buttocks
carved with obsidian.

I read off
some trade-offs
you couldn't keep up
payments on:

Carrying the other
thing money can't buy
the Epuni Boys
arrive home.

Because it is so hard
to react against
the subtle indifference
that we hardly notice

You pout, and trace
the swirls; if people
ask, you say
pain doesn't hurt.

'The Taming of the Land.'
'Employment, Health, and Education.'
'The Treasury of Whanau Life.'
'Our Economic Situation.'

Each Wednesday afternoon Grant
helps them spray-paint
their Council approved mural
on the Settler's Museum wall.

I take the song of myself
which is stolen –
cork it up and
hurl it out to sea.

NOTES

Moko: Spiral tattoos

Whanau: Family

Epuni: Famous Maori Chief. Now name of a suburb. Epuni Boys' Home is a borstal.

This poem won the Whitirea Polytech Poetry Competition in 1993.

PASSING BY

In the city you watch people.
'Hello,' you want to say,
'Hello. Are you pleased to meet me?'
But the people (of whom there are many)
are walking and riding briskly,
so as to be in time.

Except of course for those people
sitting around. They are probably
unemployed. With plenty of time
but not a lot of money.
They would like time to get off their hands
and twist about their wrists
in a managerial fashion. Tick Tock.

They are probably unemployable.
It's time they got off their butts. Hey Ho.

The girls are anxiously taking up cigarettes.
While the boys are selecting
new Doctor Martins
in which to grow into.
They are all growing angular and knowing,
wondering: how the world can be
both one thing and another
at the same time.

Already they know about loneliness,
and have had several debilitating obsessions.
They are amazed by the amount of sleep
they have slept: by the amount rumoured
still to be slept.

A TITLE

All this bloody poetry
plotting through
the pound and stash of sea
to grind up some grand and empty

God-forsaken beach.
But not so soulless, God-withdrawn
to those lives and livings
there already.

Their future tense
looms reinvented
sporting ties and walk on parts;
extras in a narrative

of somewhere else's art.
The poem's tone continues lost
yet strong and searching
for the cadence

whose rise and fall seems
the swell of brooding green
- that burnt off and became
the squall of wind through pine.

Then narrow, modulated streets
nudged out through gorse;
homes packed in stanzas,
footy fields and power lines

leading to the corner store.
History/identity tied up
with Curnow's dog's pup. It gnaws
the poem it is given to ignore.

It has nothing to do with me.
I live in the city.
That past - when the world
was black and white, like

old photographs or silent movies
on 'the telly'. Some even claim
there used to be, just the one channel
there to navigate. Though

they can't recall its name.
Where are they coming from?
This poem doesn't need a title.
It knows who it is.

EARLY SETTLER SONG

Where is the girl
with the grateful curls?
– the treasure buried in paradise?
Where is the map?
and the cook? and the ship?
and where are the pirates they promised?